

The Cleveland Museum of Art

Cleveland Museum of Art Acquires Collection of Objects from Southern Africa and Contemporary Work by Tony Oursler

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CLEVELAND (Sept. 23, 2010) – A collection of 19th- and 20th-century portable objects from southern Africa and a contemporary sculpture and video piece from American artist Tony Oursler are the latest works acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art. The acquisitions were approved by the Collections Committee of the museum's Board of Trustees at its September meeting. Among the works added to the collection by gift or purchase, the following are the most noteworthy:

Fifteen Portable Objects from Southern Africa — Acquisition makes Cleveland one of the few U.S. museums to possess a representative collection of high-quality southern African art

Until recently, objects from southern Africa — which are typically small, domestic and personal — have been perceived as being more ethnographic than artistic in nature. It has only been within the past three decades that interest in the artistic legacy of this part of the African continent, which includes present-day South Africa, Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, has grown exponentially. The 15 objects acquired by the museum, which range in cultural origin and material composition and which span the time period of the mid 1800s to mid 1900s, include both abstract and figurative works of art, and each represents a masterpiece of its type or genre.

Included in the collection are works that demonstrate the importance of cattle in both social and religious terms, as well as the significance of communication with the ancestral world. An African headrest shaped to evoke a cow or an ox served not only as a pillow to protect its owner's elaborate hairstyle during sleep, but also as a "dream machine" that helped its user contact ancestors. Two staffs and two scepters represent virtuoso pieces of carving that were objects of status and rank in addition to having functional use as walking aids or weapons.

A delicately beaded pipe and three snuff containers point to the social and religious implications among these cultures of tobacco consumption. The snuff spoons are distinguished by the fact that they were acquired in South Africa by the American Presbyterian missionary Gertrude Hance between 1870 and 1899.

A swallow-tail apron demonstrates the preeminent position of beadwork in the arts of southern Africa, and it is one of a handful of such ancient types of beading to have been preserved in the West. A lion-claw necklace, which features a double row of large, red glass beads with claws carved from bone, was the property of the Nguni elite.

This acquisition expands and enhances the museum's collection of African art, which is built mainly of objects from West and Central Africa, and makes the museum one of few in the United States to possess a representative collection of southern African art of the highest quality. Each of the works will be featured in the museum's exhibition *The Art of Daily Life: Portable Objects from Southern Africa*, which opens on April 17, 2011, and continues through Feb. 26, 2012.

Instant Dummies, Model Release Form and Sex Plotter — Three sculptures are credited with propelling American artist Tony Oursler's work into high visibility

Instant Dummies (1992, glass, cloth, hair and sex toy; dimensions variable), *Model Release Form* (1992, yellow fabric with painted text; 71.3 x 63.4 cm.) and *Sex Plotter* (1992, cloth, hair, LCD, video projector, videotape, tripod; dimensions variable) were originally featured at *Documenta IX*, a survey of contemporary art, in Germany in 1992 as the core of a larger installation, *The Watching*. Since that time, they have become pivotal pieces in the career of American artist Tony Oursler (b. 1957), whose later work developed in form and content from them.

Oursler developed the objects around the shared notion that Hollywood manipulates popular imagination with its fixation on violence and sex. *Sex Plotter* features a puppet-like figure that lies motionless on the floor as its blank head provides the screen for a projection of a woman reciting imaginary movie love stories. (The performer is Canton, Ohio, native Constance DeJong, an artist and writer.) *Instant Dummies* are blown-glass capsules that stand for imaginary pills that dissolve in water and turn into full-size synthetic humans. Finally, *Model Release Form* is based on the actual language of similar documents that are provided to actors to release the use of their likenesses to motion picture producers, and it provides a reminder of how the film industry alters the identities of both performers and viewers.

Oursler graduated from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, in 1979. Incorporated by Walt Disney in 1961 for interdisciplinary education, CalArts had by the 1970s emerged as one of the nation's most important art schools. The faculty included conceptual artists, such as John Baldessari and Michael Asher, who encouraged students to take up the camera. The new generation understood the pervasive influence of images and felt that pictures, rather than firsthand experience, had come to define life. Like many of his L.A. peers, Oursler drew on underground comics and pulp literature. He participated in defining a new, grotesque perspective on popular culture, pervaded by a sense of alienation, antisocial behavior and vulnerability. Oursler's work helped define the spirit of the arts in the 1990s, which emphasized feelings of anxiety regarding the future at the beginning of the millennium.

The Oursler acquisition enhances the museum's holdings in video art while providing a foundation for future acquisitions of a variety of postmodern trends.

About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 40,000 objects and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. Currently undergoing a multi-phase renovation and expansion project, it is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship, performing arts and art education. Admission to the museum is free.

The Cleveland Museum of Art has a membership of more than 21,500 households and is supported by a broad range of individuals, foundations and businesses in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio. The museum is generously funded by Cuyahoga County residents through Cuyahoga Arts and Culture. Additional support comes from the Ohio Arts Council, which helps fund the museum with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. For more information about the museum, its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit www.ClevelandArt.org [1].

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org [2].

Press Announcements [3]

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